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(U) THE AFGHAN RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN 1981:
PROGRESS, BUT A LONG WAY TO GO

Summary

(U) Note: This is the first of two reports on Afghanistan's resistance movement. The first report presents an overall view of the nationalist effort and discusses objectives, organization, achievements in 1981, weaknesses and failures, sources of strength, and potential. The second will review the current status of the resistance in each province, to the extent that information is available.

(U) In the past year the resistance (mujahidin) movement's military successes have far overshadowed its setbacks. In addition to denying the Babrak regime an opportunity to secure its hold on the country, the resistance has put the regime increasingly on the defensive, brought about a crisis in the Afghan Army, and caused a breakdown in many areas of the economy. Politically, the resistance remains fragmented, but cooperation between mujahidin bands has increased and efforts continue among exile groups to overcome the obstacles to some measure of unity.

(C) Both sides in the Afghan conflict have improved their tactics and capabilities. The result is a continuing standoff, but one in which the initiative currently lies with the resistance, although the Soviets retain the advantage of superior force. The standoff prevails equally in key areas where both the freedom fighters and the Soviet/Afghan forces have concentrated their greatest efforts and in more remote regions, where the Soviet effort is more sporadic but where the mujahideen have had less access to weapons and training.

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(S) The resistance has had the edge in terms of accomplishing short-term objectives and has numerous psychological victories to its credit. But its offensive capabilities remain severely limited in the face of superior Soviet firepower. Nevertheless, while the mujahidin do not have the power to force a Soviet retreat, their record last year appears to have caused the Soviets considerable concern.

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The Resistance: Objectives

(U) Tying the many elements of the Afghan resistance movement together are the twin objectives of forcing the Soviet troops to leave Afghanistan and unseating the puppet Babrak Karmal government. Beyond that there is a wide divergence of aspirations and views concerning the future.

(U) Each of the myriad guerrilla bands engaged in the conflict is motivated by local, tribal, ethnic, and regional priorities. For previously suppressed minority ethnic groups, the struggle provides an opportunity to establish a claim to equal rights and recognition. For most regions, it is an opportunity to establish a degree of autonomy--a traditional goal of Afghan tribes. There is advantage and disadvantage to the multiplicity of motives. Everyone has an incentive to join the battle, but conversely, as separate tribes achieve a degree of autonomy, they may lose their motivation to continue the struggle--i.e., to join a common national effort.

(C) The Soviets and the Babrak regime have tried to exploit tribal susceptibilities. To date, however, their successes have proved temporary; those tribes that have succumbed to Babrak's bribes have later gone back to war. In the past, few Afghans had a sense of nation, but it may be slowly developing now in response to the Soviet occupation.

(U) Leaders of resistance organizations in Peshawar view the conflict somewhat differently from resistance leaders based inside Afghanistan. They have established political parties, some of which cross tribal, ethnic, and regional lines, and they hope to become figures of national importance. Although each of these leaders derives his authority from his Islamic religious credentials, there are major ideological differences among them--basically, between fundamentalists and more moderate traditionalists.

(U) Translated into specifics, resistance goals lead local mujahidin forces to try to drive government authority out of their area; all symbols of government, civil and military, are targets. Civil targets include government and party offices and

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officials, numerous state-run economic enterprises, and schools. Military targets are army, militia, and police units. An important related objective is the acquisition of weapons and ammunition (as well as food, fuel, and other necessities) from government and Soviet stocks. This has led to frequent attacks on military supply convoys and to a major struggle for control over transport routes.

(C) The political parties in Peshawar have the additional specific goal of trying to build constituencies inside Afghanistan that will acknowledge their preeminence. This brings Peshawar client bands into conflict with local leadership and with bands affiliated with rival exile leaders. In the ensuing, usually costly, turf fights, the mujahidin often lose sight of the more important overall goals of the resistance movement.

Organization

(C) The resistance is gradually beginning to assume some definable shape, although it still bears a strong resemblance to a patchwork quilt. The conflicting dynamics of tribal and regional-oriented groups inside Afghanistan versus the political parties in Peshawar and the rivalries among the latter lead to constantly shifting constellations.

(C) The hydra-headed nature of the resistance has been frequently cited as an advantage in that there has been no single target for Soviet fire. But a more cohesive effort need not exclude local initiative and widespread activity. It can result in a more concentrated effort against a priority target or, as has been demonstrated in recent months, cooperation for defense of a stronghold. If the resistance is to move beyond its current level, more coordination is essential.

(C/NF) During the past year, there have been some signs of coalescence of the resistance movement inside Afghanistan. Regional tribal associations have been formed, such as those of Nuristan, the Hazarajat, and the Durrani tribes. First steps have been taken for interregional cooperation among these associations. The impressive Tadzhik leader in the Panjsher Valley is providing training for mujahidin bands in the north and reportedly also for Nuristanis to his east. Local cooperation among mujahidin bands affiliated with different organizations in Peshawar has had very positive results.

(S) Ironically, at the same time that the tribal and regional groups which bear the brunt of the fighting have become progressively more disillusioned with the Peshawar organizations, they have simultaneously become more dependent on them. This

unwelcome symbiotic relationship has grown out of the increasing importance of outside assistance to the resistance movement.

(C) Most mujahidin leaders, particularly those near Pakistan, periodically go to Peshawar or Quetta to arrange for supplies from one or another of the six major political organizations, which the Pakistani Government has recognized.^{1/} And in a given area, each of the six parties may be represented by one or more mujahidin fighting units. In most cases, however, there is not a strong sense of allegiance; the choice of patron is frequently governed by who has arms to distribute. Mujahidin leaders not only switch allegiances, but also sometimes receive assistance from two organizations at the same time.

(C) The fact that the ties of allegiance sit lightly may facilitate cooperation in the field between bands whose Peshawar sponsors are in competition. One exception, even in the field, however, has been the forces subordinate to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the exile leader often said to have the most effective organization. Gulbuddin got off to a fast start in the resistance game by virtue of having had an organization already in place in Pakistan when the April 1978 coup sparked the resistance movement. Gulbuddin, however, now is seeing his once-preeminent position eroded in a number of areas; consequently, his men have frequently been involved in turf fights with other resistance forces. Coordination between various mujahidin bands during the summer and early fall of 1981 is said to have occurred partly in self-defense

^{1/} (U) These organizations can be split roughly into two groups: the fundamentalists and the moderate-traditionalists. The fundamentalists include: the Hizbi Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar; the Hizbi Islami-Khalis faction, led by Mohammad Yunus Khalis; the Jamiat-i-Islami-Afghanistan, led by Burhanuddin Rabbani; and the Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami, led by Maulvi Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi. Pir Syed Ahmad Gailani, leader of the Mahaz-i-Milli-Islami, and Pir Sibghatullah Mojadedi, head of the Jabha-i-Majat-i-Milli, are considered to be moderate traditionalists. Efforts to unite the six groups have produced shifting alliances. From March 1980 to March 1981 five of the groups (Gulbuddin Hekmatyar refused to join) belonged to the Islamic Alliance. The Alliance's demise led to a realignment with the two moderates plus Mohammad Nabi in one group and the three remaining fundamentalists in the other. Most recently, a new alliance of five groups (Alliance of Islamic Freedom Fighters) has been announced, but this time Syed Ahmad Gailani is the leader left out.

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against Gulbuddin's followers. Publicity in the Western press about the internecine fighting has caused Gulbuddin some concern and has led to efforts by the new Islamic Alliance to settle the disputes.

(C) Another important development inside Afghanistan during the past year has been the emergence of mujahidin leaders who have organizational skills and command respect. In the beginning of the resistance movement, age and hereditary tribal position often dictated the choice of leaders, but now men who have been tested in battle and have demonstrated an aptitude for command are taking over. Prominent examples are Ahmad Shah Masud, the leader of the Panjsher Valley forces, and Major (now "General") Syed Mohammad Jagrand (also called Jaglan) in the Hazarajat.

(C) In Peshawar, the six recognized religious/political parties are still plagued by rivalries, not only among the six but also within the separate organizations. Furthermore, most of these groups are opposed to efforts to unite the resistance movement under the aegis of a countrywide assembly of tribal leaders-- a Loya Jirga, the traditional Afghan format for selecting national leadership.

(C) The current conflict between the religious leaders, who dominate the Peshawar organizations, and the secular leaders, who head the regional organizations and support the Loya Jirga concept, reflects a longstanding struggle in Afghanistan between tribal chiefs (the king being the paramount tribal leader) and mullahs-- the clergy. Afghan mullahs probably see the present Afghan situation as an opportunity to assert preeminent authority. They are actively involved in support of the Peshawar groups, trying to resolve the bitter disputes among them.

(C) The concept of a Loya Jirga, however, has considerably more potential for giving structure and leadership to the resistance movement than any alliance of the six Peshawar leaders. The latter have been discredited in the eyes of many mujahidin and, in ethnic and tribal terms, represent only a limited Afghan constituency. The first resistance Jirga was held in Peshawar in May 1980, when representatives drawn from all corners of Afghanistan met to lay the groundwork for regional coordination. The dramatic gathering sparked much hope, but opposition from the established Peshawar parties and ineffective leadership of the executive council established by the Jirga turned this into an isolated event.

(S) Later in 1980, however, an effort was launched to build a more solid foundation for future jirga by establishing regional

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tribal alliances, which could eventually coalesce into a national assembly. In March 1981, meetings were held in Peshawar under the sponsorship of already-formed regional associations, to promote similar associations in other parts of the country. The number of regional associations has subsequently grown, but their authority has remained limited.

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(C) One of the most nettlesome unresolved questions related to the Loya Jirga idea is whether former King Zahir should be urged to participate in and to assume leadership of the resistance movement. Many Afghans believe that only the King can provide a true symbol of unity. But some fundamentalists are staunchly opposed to his return.

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Zahir has said that he would respond to an irresistible call from all involved parties, but that is not likely to be forthcoming in the foreseeable future.


(S/NF/NC/OC) In September 1981, a Jirga was held in Quetta, Pakistan, sponsored by Pushtun and Baluch tribal leaders of southern and western Afghanistan who jumped the gun and issued a call for the King. The move was probably unwelcome to other regional leaders.

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The meeting probably served a limited useful purpose as a regional gathering of resistance representatives from southern and western Afghanistan. But by denouncing and being denounced by the Peshawar groups, it also highlighted the deep divisions in the resistance movement.

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(S/NF/NC/OC) One last component of the resistance which should be mentioned is the exile community of prominent Afghans, now living in Europe and the United States. The most notable exile is former Prime Minister Yousuf; another is former Deputy Prime Minister Samad Hamid. Some of these men have been playing an active role in resistance politics but have not, as yet, had a major impact. 

Achievements in 1981

(U) These figures are corroborated by observers who paid return visits in 1981 to areas observed the year before. In 1981, in provinces that border Pakistan and are therefore particularly important to Soviet defense strategy, the mujahidin and their foreign guests were able to travel at will and during daylight hours for long distances and through numerous small towns and villages without fear of detection.

(U) In the 75 percent of the country where the resistance exercises de facto control, resistance leaders have set up their own administration, making laws, collecting taxes, dispensing justice, and providing services. Even in areas where there is nominal government authority (maintained by a military presence), the resistance often runs parallel governments. In the cities of Qandahar and Herat, for example, the mujahidin dictate curfew hours, establish price controls, and levy taxes. In almost all areas the dividing line between government and resistance authority will be still more clearly drawn at the edge of an important town, with the mujahidin controlling traffic, manning roadblocks, and levying duties just beyond this line. This is the currently prevailing situation just outside Kabul. Frequently, local

civilian and military authorities buy a tenuous peace from the mujahidin by supplying them with weapons and ammunition.

(U) During the course of 1981, the resistance demonstrated an impressive capability for bringing the war to major cities. The freedom fighters "held" Qandahar for much of the summer and early fall; they kept Herat in periodic turmoil; and even in Kabul, nightly gun battles, frequent assassinations, and intensifying attacks on government and Soviet installations attested to a significant mujahidin presence in spite of tight security and repeated house-to-house search operations.

(S/NF/NC/OC) The resistance also, throughout the year, demonstrated a growing capability to interfere with the Soviet/Afghan supply system. Refined tactics and better weapons brought disaster to numerous convoys on all major routes, including the vital link between the Soviet border and Kabul. The regime has been forced to rely increasingly on air transport to supply not only isolated military posts, but also garrisons in a growing number of provincial capitals. /

(U) Among the most impressive achievements of the mujahidin last year were successful defensive operations against major Soviet offensives. These included the well-publicized defense of the strategically located (northeast of Kabul) Panjsher Valley in September, the successful turning back of two efforts to take Younus Khalis' base in Nangarhar Province, and the mujahidin's ability to maintain a stronghold in Paghman just 12 miles from Kabul in spite of persistent efforts to dislodge them.

Sources of Strength

(U) The preeminent source of strength for the resistance movement is the support it receives from the Afghan people, regardless of ethnic group or tribal affiliation. That the Soviets recognize the overwhelming nature of this support is evident from the tremendous effort they have put into political and propaganda work to discredit the mujahidin and make the regime's policies attractive.

(U) Particularly beneficial aspects of the general popular support are the critical breakdown in the recruitment system for the Afghan armed forces and the widespread collusion between the mujahidin and the military establishment. In September 1981, anticipating that perhaps two-thirds of currently serving enlisted

8
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men (estimated at a total of around 30,000) were due for discharge in December, the government announced a mobilization of almost all reservists up to age 35. The call-up provoked an extremely negative reaction and the regime backtracked quickly, establishing numerous categories of exemptions. Original estimates of eligible reservists reportedly were lowered from 450,000 to 85,000. The results of the call-up continue to be disappointing; it is unlikely to produce more than 15,000-20,000 able-bodied men, many of whom will desert as quickly as possible.

(U) The government would have preferred not to discharge any currently serving men, not only because it needs them, but also because of the danger of making such a large pool of trained soldiers available to the mujahidin. The discharge was announced, however, on December 4, probably because the regime dared not run the risk of the explosive reaction which could have followed a further extension of service. But every effort is being made to ensure that those who are officially discharged actually remain in the army or related security services.

(U) Soviet policy rests on having the Afghan Army spearhead the anti-guerrilla fighting and on eventually turning the prosecution of the war over to the Afghans. There appears to be no possibility of realizing this goal in any foreseeable future.

(C) Collusion between the mujahidin and the security forces is a major asset for the resistance. Successful guerrilla raids on police and military arms depots are frequently the result of "inside" assistance, and intelligence provided to the mujahidin by military officers is indispensable.

(C) Perhaps the most significant factor in the improvement in mujahidin capabilities has been the increasing cooperation among resistance bands in the field, which in turn has led to more sophisticated military strategy. In a growing number of instances, including the campaigns in the Panjsher and at Paghman, mujahidin from outside the immediate battle zone have contributed their services. Coordination between bands has led to flanking and rear-action tactics with effective results.

(C) The impressive mujahidin record of 1981 is also due, in large measure, to an improved weapons position. Outside help has contributed, but should not be overestimated. Basically, it appears to have given the freedom fighters a better defensive capability to protect their strongholds and a capability to attack supply convoys, which in turn become a major source of weapons. In some key areas around Kabul and near the Pakistan border, the

supply of arms during the spring and summer of 1981 was reported to be adequate. Arms and particularly ammunition shortages can develop quickly, however, and resupply can be delayed and difficult.

(C) In many parts of the country the mujahidin are still seriously underarmed in relation to the potential fighting force. The arms question is basic to mujahidin morale. Without arms they are discouraged; with them, they seem prepared to endure inordinate hardship indefinitely.

Weaknesses and Failures

(U) Although the resistance movement has clearly been growing stronger and more effective, the limits of its capabilities are still pronounced. The mujahidin can turn back a major Soviet offensive into the Panjsher Valley, but they cannot mount a similar offensive against a Soviet stronghold. They can virtually control life inside the city of Qandahar, but they cannot drive the Soviet military forces away from the Soviet base on the outskirts or prevent them from bombarding the city and eventually sending in their troops. They can control entire provinces in the Hazarajat, but they cannot prevent a token Soviet military presence in this remote area which enables the regime to fly the flag in the provincial capitals. If the mujahidin push too far, if they threaten to banish all symbols of Kabul's authority, they and the local civilian population inevitably will be subjected to ruthless retaliation.

(U) The guerrilla fighters have successfully defended mountain strongholds, but they cannot defend villages and towns along main roads which serve as a base for ambush operations against convoys. Nor can they protect the civilian populations in and near provincial and district capitals that are being fought over. Many of these villages and towns have been subjected to frequent aerial bombardment and to periodic search and destroy missions, which are also intended to round up recruits for the military.

(U) As the mujahidin have extended their control, more and more of the country has returned to relative normalcy, a fact that has impressed recent visitors. In other areas, however, particularly those close to Kabul, other major cities, main roads, and resistance strongholds, Soviet forces are attacking with increasing intensity. Recently, military forces have begun to clear away buildings and trees, which have served as protective cover for the mujahidin, in a wide swath along the roads running north and south from Kabul.

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(U) Some writers have suggested that because of the exodus of refugees fleeing from the war, freedom fighters will no longer be able to be "lost" in the general population. This may be a problem in provinces adjacent to Pakistan and Iran, which have seen the greatest loss of inhabitants. In other areas, however, a substantial proportion of the population has remained in the villages.

(C) Charges that the Soviets are deliberately trying to empty the country of the civilian population do not seem to be well founded. The Babrak regime and the Soviets are trying to exploit the refugees as a potentially destabilizing element in Pakistan, but are aware that the enormous refugee population emphasizes the illegitimacy of the Babrak regime. They and the government are trying hard to entice the refugees to return.

(C) Apart from the obvious disparity in its weapon position vis-a-vis the Soviets, the most debilitating weakness of the resistance is its lack of unity. Skeptics doubt that such a divided people can ever achieve the centralized direction necessary to raise the resistance threat beyond its present level. Certainly, the record of the political organizations in Peshawar supports this thesis, as does the fact that there has been no reconciliation between the political organizations as a group and those who propose a Loya Jirga approach.

(U) The Soviets are aware of this basic weakness and are making every effort to exploit it by appealing to regional, ethnic, tribal, and religious aspirations in order to gain support for the regime. The reorganization of the old Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs into the Ministry of Nationalities and Tribal Affairs, together with the appearance of newspapers and radio programs in regional languages, indicates the thrust of this policy. So does the creation of a special department for religious affairs in the Prime Ministry.

(C) The regime has also used monetary bribes to gain the support of key tribes and special interest groups and has reverted to the traditional practice of exempting certain tribes along the border from military conscription in return for their role in guarding the border routes. In August 1981, the government announced new land reform regulations which, in effect, offer exemption from land confiscation in return for supporting the Babrak regime. None of these measures has proved particularly effective. Incentives to escape land confiscation are meaningless in areas where the government lacks sufficient authority to impose a land reform program. Border tribes are not as fickle;

recently several which had previously appeared to have been bought off by the regime resumed an active role in the resistance.

(U) The failure of these efforts and of the National Fatherland Front, which as the cornerstone of Soviet/regime political policy was designed to legitimize the Babrak regime, demonstrates that the Soviets and Babrak have been unable, to date, to turn the fragmented nature of the resistance to their advantage.

The Future

(S/NF/NC/OC) Statements by Afghan leaders and a growing number of articles in the Soviet press signify that the Babrak regime and the Soviets are sensitive about the increasing strength of the resistance movement. A high-level Soviet military delegation in Kabul since early last fall has been planning operations and studying the political and military situation. Its members have held discussions with a wide range of top Afghan party officials.

(C) Soviet decisions based on current assessments will play a large part in determining the next stages in the Afghan struggle and, by extension, in the fortunes of the resistance movement. Although the possibility that the Soviets will significantly increase their forces cannot be ruled out, it seems more likely that they will follow their previous practice of trying to improve their military tactics and concentrating on political strategy. This could, however, entail moderate increases in the total number of Soviet troops.

(S/NF/NC/OC) Resistance forces have observed a definite shift in Soviet military practices. The Soviets have recently used mobile commando units dropped behind resistance lines to achieve a pincer effect. They have also initiated nighttime ambushes, have used helicopters to attack mujahidin-occupied caves with chemical weapons, and have positioned Afghan Army troops to spearhead ground operations with Soviet troops directly behind to keep the Afghans from fleeing. The Soviets have had some success with these tactics and may be optimistic that they can be still further refined.

(C) Soviet options for stage-managing a satisfactory internal political solution are severely circumscribed. Developments during autumn 1981, including Prime Minister Keshtmand's prolonged (10-week) stay in Moscow, and renewed maneuvering by the Khalqi faction gave rise to speculation about impending political changes. Subsequent developments, however, particularly the

12
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publicity attending Babrak's presentation of the Afghan Sun of Freedom Order to Brezhnev and his state visit to Bulgaria (both in December) suggest the Soviets are not prepared to make radical changes at this time. In any event, Soviet concern about the political aspects of the Afghan problem--internal and international--should continue to militate against any rapid large-scale increase of Soviet troops, although gradual increments are a viable option.

(S) Nor are the Pakistanis likely to alter radically their policies or to abandon their support for the resistance.

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(S/NF/NC/OC) Iranian policy is also likely to continue favoring support for the mujahidin, particularly those of the Shiite sect.

 The recent Iranian peace plan suggests that the Iranians see the Afghan situation as an opportunity to export their own brand of revolutionary Islam.

(C) If the above assumptions that there will not be any major changes in the policies of the Soviet Union, Pakistan, or Iran are correct, then it follows that the most important factor determining the next stages of the resistance is its own ability to unite its many separate elements into a cohesive movement. To date the mujahidin have done remarkably well in spite of the prevailing anarchy within the movement. The improved performance during 1981 clearly demonstrates, however, that coordination among fighting groups can significantly increase their effectiveness. An important beginning has been made on the local level. The question is whether it can progress to broader alliances encompassing more territory and eventually to a national organization.

(C) This is not to suggest that a united resistance could physically force the Soviets out of Afghanistan. But it could make their position there considerably more difficult to maintain, raising the question of relative costs versus gains. The current Soviet program of educating and training 1,500-2,000 young Afghans per year in the Soviet Union clearly indicates that Moscow is taking a long-range view. But as the Soviets look into the future, they may see that their long-term political interests in

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